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AMERICA'S DUTY TO THE WAR-BURDENED WORLD

From a sermon by Rev. Edward Cummings, on the Russian Famine, at the South Congregational Church, Boston, March 3, 1907.

If there is abundant grain to be had in Siberia, and only a dollar's worth a month is needed to save a life, why, in Heaven's name, men exclaim, doesn't the Russian Government stop building battleships and go to buying grain? Why doesn't it stop raising loans to buy the munitions of war to fight other nations, and go to raising loans to save the lives of these starving millions of its own subjects? That is a perfectly obvious and reasonable question. Everybody asks it. But there is no answer but the grim fact that nations do become so infatuated with the suicidal lust for naval and military power that the provision of battleships and munitions of war is regarded as the first necessity of national life, more necessary even than the provision for starving millions.

On the other hand, could anything better illustrate the wicked, deluded, false condition of our national and international code of ethics than this appalling situation in Russia? Think of it! The government of one of the most powerful nations in the world so obsessed with suicidal notions of military aggrandizement that it pleads the absolute necessity, even in time of famine, of spending millions of money buying ships and guns and preparing for war, when millions of its own people are slowly starving for lack of a dollar's worth of food per month! To such hideous consequences has our brutal and antiquated theory of international relations brought the world today.

And who is to blame for these conditions? What is this alleged necessity which the Russian government pleads in extenuation of its conduct today? Whence comes this dreadful necessity which compels it to rob starving peasants of their last crust in order that it may build battleships and buy munitions of war? Why, the "necessity" arises solely from the fact that Germany, France, England, Japan and the United States have great navies or armies, against which Russia must be prepared to defend her national honor or integrity or vanity, by an equal array of ships and men.

Yes, you say, but what dire necessity compels Germany, France, England and Japan to tax themselves almost to the limit of human endurance, until they fairly stagger under the crushing burden of their military expenditures? Well, the answer seems almost an insult to human intelligence. The necessity that compels Germany is the fact that France, England, Russia and the others do it. The necessity which compels France is the example of Germany, England, Russia, the United States and Japan. The necessity which compels England is the example of France, Germany, Russia and the United States. And so on and on they go, round and round this vicious circle, in a dizzy competitive war dance of mutual destruction. Each one is reluctantly compelled to follow the fatal example of all his neighbors; and all the neighbors are compelled to follow helplessly the example of each new increase of armament,—each blindly compelled by all, and all by each!

This suicidal policy of mutual distrust would of itself seem bad enough, and discreditable enough to civilized nations. But this is not all. The fiendish ingenuity of this infernal machine for national self-destruction is not complete until you have added the motor which keeps it going automatically and makes it more and more destructive every year. That automatic motor is the familiar, sophistical and self-contradictory and damnable theory or argument that the army and navy of each separate nation must be strong enough and big enough to defeat the army and navy of any other one, or perhaps of any other two!

Never in the whole history of the human race has the Father of Lies imposed upon poor, credulous human nature with a more specious, or more villainous, or more disastrous, or more sinful, or more disgraceful, or more self-contradictory falsehood than this, which is still misleading the statesmen of the civilized world today. As a theory of international relations, it hasn't a shred—not a single trace—of intellectual or moral respectability about it. It does not rise to the level of clear thinking or plain dealing. It is a sophistical delusion and snare, from which the world must extricate itself, if our civilization is to escape the suicidal horrors of self-destruction.

Fortunately for us, this nation has been able in the past to stand aloof from this deadly suicidal compact. We have been that happy and envied nation which could boast that it needed no great armies or navies. Our prosperous and contented farmers and mechanics have gone singing about their work, because they did not have to carry on their backs a soldier or a sailor, as European laborers have had to do. But somehow we, too, have caught the infatuation of late. "We the people"—we the farmers and mechanics—seem to want to be in the European fashion, and have a nicely uniformed and splendidly equipped soldier or sailor on our backs, as we go about our daily work. We have not yet come to the

point of taking the bread from the mouths of starving millions in order that we may build battleships and forts. But we have come to the point where we rob our children of the schools and colleges and opportunities for industrial training and technical education, which are absolutely essential to the continued welfare and happiness and prosperity of this nation, in order that we may build battleships and buy munitions of foreign war, of which there is small prospect and less need. And we are not robbing our own people and our own children alone by these mad endeavors to join the international war dance and follow the example of less fortunate nations and ape the military fashions of Europe. We are also doing the world a great wrong. Every unnecessary battleship we build out of our abundant wealth not only robs us of a great university or training school for our children; it also sets a new standard of military waste and extravagance, which must be adopted by peoples who are already staggering beneath burdens of militarism which they can scarcely carry. "We the people" of the United States are in part responsible for the incredible spectacle of a country like Russia, or like China, or like Japan spending millions in preparation for wars which ought never and need never come—while millions of their men, women and children are crying for a crust of bread. And yet, with unspeakable levity and criminal disregard for the terrible lessons of the past, Americans are actually proposing to celebrate the birth of this nation by making the international Exposition at Jamestown primarily a great military and naval pageant, glorifying from beginning to end what are called in the progam, in ghastly irony, "the splendors of war." I rejoice, as all patriotic Americans must do, that a ringing protest has been sounded from the midst of the Exposition's own advisory board. I rejoice that a score of the bishops of the Episcopal Church have earnestly endorsed this protest against a program which one of their number has rightly called "unworthy of a Christian nation." From every pulpit and every newspaper in the land should come a strong Amen! With what power, in this Longfellow centennial time, sound in our ears those lines of the great poet in his poem on the Springfield Arsenal:

"Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts."

True, "We the people" have done something to prepare the way for the mitigation of this international curse,—by favoring the establishment of The Hague tribunal and an international parliament. But we have not done half enough. "We the people" have not made our national representatives feel half enough that this problem of international justice and international disarmament must be solved, in the interest of ourselves, of our children, of our country, of humanity. We have not demanded this in the name of reason, of common sense, of morality, of religion, as the first duty of our statesmen to their country and to the world, and the first duty of our country to the great family of sister nations.

For our own sakes, and for the sake of humanity, we must do everything in our power as individuals and as a nation to establish a supreme court of international justice, so that right and not might shall prevail. Then disarmament can and will follow, and an international police force will replace the hostile armies and navies of today. Happily we have, almost unconsciously, been trying a typical experiment, which proves to ourselves and to the world what can be done, and ought to be done, and must be done in this matter. For, as the President of Harvard University recently pointed out, the United States and Canada have avoided all the waste and dangers of international armaments by a very simple agreement, which has lasted for ninety years. This is the agreement made after the War of 1812, restricting the armaments of the United States and Canada on the great lakes to the insignificant little gunboats used for police duty. God grant that this experiment may be prophetic of what is coming to all the great nations of the world!

Meanwhile let us do our duty for the starving millions, who cannot wait,—and whose lives can be bought at the rate of five dollars each! For the love of God, buy all you can! Unhappily Russia is not the only famine-stricken country in the great family of nations. I do not know which country is in the worst plight, Russia or China. These are our neighbors, our sister nations in God's family of nations. Help and sympathy are their just due. We must not shirk our duty nor neglect our opportunity. They are our near neighbors. Money can be telegraphed and made available at once. They are our powerful neighbors. Both Russia and China are giant nations waking from sleep and passing through the throes of a revolution which will give them a new and more important rôle in international history. To come generously to their rescue and bind them to us now with bonds of sympathy and gratitude will be more help and protection to our nation in the future than battleships, torpedo boats and submarines. I wish our Congress were wise enough to vote the price of a battleship for the relief of both Russia and China—and cut down our prospective navy by that amount. Such a generous and courageous example might be the beginning of a new epoch of international justice and good will and disarmament.

Anonymous.
March 12, 1907